From: Jeff Muse
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 12/27/01 9:55am
Subject: proposed Microsoft settlement

To Whom it May Concern:

I would like to spend a few moments discussing the proposed anti-trust
settlement with Microsoft. One of the ways I make a living is by
migrating individuals and business from Microsoft products to those
produced by the open-source community, so I am in a good position to
assess the impact of Microsoft's actions on the market.

For a long time, it has been painfully clear to me that there are
a number of issues that need to be addressed in order for the playing
field in the computer and software markets to be level. In no particular
order, they are:

1) Eliminate the bundling of Microsoft operating systems with hardware.

Currently, it is difficult, indeed nearly impossible, to buy a PC without
a Microsoft operating system pre-installed. This has the effect of making
consumers pay for an operating system whether they want it or not. Worse
yet, this situation increases the proliferation of Microsoft based
viruses and worms by shipping Outlook and Outlook Express as mail clients.
These mail programs are far and away the most common vector for the spread
of malicious code throughout the Internet. In the current state of concern for
national security - which was one of the concerns cited by Judge Kollar-Kotelly
in urging a swift settlement - it is incomprehensible that this situation would
not be addressed. As matters stand now, the current Microsoft monopoly has no
reason to improve the security of its systems.

2) Require that any Microsoft file formats have published standards.

One of the most vexing issues in transitioning away from Microsoft is that
many clients feel tied to Microsoft and its office suite because they are
concerned that they will not be able to read documents sent to them by others.
This is problematic for two reasons. First, rather than choose the best
software available based on price and features, consumers choose Microsoft
products because that's what everyone else uses. Second, the closed file
formats used by Microsoft software allow Microsoft to force consumers to
upgrade not only programs but hardware as well, consequently forcing the
purchase of more powerful machines which just coincidentally come pre-installed
with a Microsoft operating system. This is accomplished by changing the closed
file formats every so often.

A case in point is my mother, who had a perfectly functional older PC with
Windows 95 and Office 95. She could not read documents sent to her
that were written in Office 2000. As her machine was not powerful enough

to handle the newer versions of Windows, she was forced to buy new hardware in order to run software that would read her email attachments.

3) Publish all Microsoft interoperability specifications.

Microsoft is notorious for an "embrace and extend" policy with regards to industry standards. A case in point in Kerberos, the authentication policy that runs with Windows 2000. For years, this was an open standard used by the Unix community. After Microsoft's embrace and extension, Kerberos on Microsoft failed to work with Kerberos on Unix. Had the specifications for the Microsoft extensions of Kerberos been published, this attempted lock-in to Microsoft products would have failed.

Another example is Samba, a program used to emulate a Windows server on various flavors of Unix. Samba developers have been forced to spend quite a bit of time reverse-engineering rather then developing software. Were it not for them, Microsoft would have a much larger chunk of the server market than they do currently. Having monopolized the desktop, as illustrated above, they then attempted to make sure that only Windows servers would work with the ubiquitous desktop machines.

Opening Microsoft's standards will expose their products to a higher level of scrutiny than previously possible. There is a saying in the open source community: "With enough eyes, all bugs are shallow." These additional eyes can only improve the performance and security of Microsoft products. Consequently, the standards to be opened must be available to all, and at the time of product release. Restricting access to a privileged few will dilute the efficacy of the solutions to Microsoft's monopoly.

It is also necessary to realize that the rest of the world, with a few notable exceptions, is moving towards open standards in computing. As globalization and international trade increase, we may find that continued endorsement of Microsoft's practices will have an isolating effect.

In short, the existing Microsoft monopoly is harmful to consumers, to our national security, and to our nation's commercial interests. A strong and vigorously enforced anti-trust settlement, such as outlined above, will rectify these problems.

Sincerely,

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